



How 'Awa Travels the World

Kia Weaver

*I sit at the grave of my grandma.
Kalani Kekoanui Esther Patterson.
My own granddaughter is with me,
her red hair dancing with the sun,
causing the memories to come.*

*Sunlight softens hard lines, life
on my grandma's dark weathered skin.
I wish my freckles would blend.*

*Grandma Esther sings
"Meleana E."*

*We are planting corn.
The earth yields to my grandma,
just as the forest trusts her
with a limping raccoon,
a bluejay with a broken wing.*

*Once, she stood in the clean, swept kitchen,
reading a letter from Hawaii.*

*Her mom had died last winter.
It was Spring.*

Correspondence

Kia Weaver, Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 96822, U.S.A. kweaver@hawaii.edu

Ethnobotany Research & Applications 2:139-141 (2004)

*She raised her apron to cover her face
and turned away.*

*That night in the garden I saw her
uprooting a strange, dense plant.*

*She cut the roots and
pounded them,
smashed them,
squeezed them till they bled.*

*She mixed the juice
with water,
with her tears.*

*Drinking the muddy liquid,
she saw the question in my eyes
and told me this story.*

*“In my village
there was one bruddah and one sistah.*

They born da same time and get da same soul.

But they no mo’ maddah or faddah.

*Bruddah only get sistah.
And sistah only get bruddah.*

*One day sistah make, she wen die.
Bruddah wen bury her.*

*He so sad. He no mo’ nobody.
He go her grave everyday and he stay cry.*

*Six full moons come and
all kine plants grow.*

*One day bruddah saw one rat.
Da rat ate da roots of one plant, one wit da leaves
like dis (grandma draws a heart in the air)
And da rat die, da boy tink.*

*So da boy say
"Dis plant grow from my sistah
and my sistah want me be wit her."*

*So bruddah ate da roots and his mouth all tingle,
his muscles all relax.*

He tink he go'n die and be wit sistah.

But he no die, not even da rat.

*So he go away and come back next day
and eat some mo' roots.*

*His mouth come numb again
And dis time his heart no hurt no mo'.*

*His mine come clear and he remembah.
He remembah his sistah and he stay all happy.*

*He den go back to da loi
and work again, and live again.
And he see dat dis plant grow from his sistah,
not so he can die, but so dat his heart no soa no mo'
at least for small time.*

*Scattered on my grandma's grave are
bracken fern, white trillium, purple foxglove,
a lone 'awa plant.*

*This tropical plant shouldn't grow here unaided
in the cold Pacific Northwest.*

But this plant grows from my grandma.

*It holds her stories, told and untold,
of a hard life, an island left
for a strange, cold place.*

*I dig some of the roots and chew.
and tell my granddaughter a story.*